

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM,  
ADMINISTRATION/SAFETY POLICE BUILDING  
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.  
1100)  
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)  
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)  
Southwest of the intersection of Consuelo Street & Dahlia Avenue  
Downey  
Los Angeles County  
California

HABS CA-2800-AA  
*HABS CA-2800-AA*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, ADMINISTRATION / SAFETY POLICE BUILDING  
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1100)  
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AA

**Location:** 7601 Imperial Highway, The Administration / Safety Police Building is located in the northwest corner of the Consuelo Street traffic circle, southwest of the intersection of Consuelo Street and Dahlia Avenue.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754043 N; 392652.3 E

**Present Owner / Occupant:** County of Los Angeles

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** The Administration / Safety Police Building is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history as well as Criterion C for its ability to embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Located on what is now known as the Rancho Los Amigos South Campus, the historic district portrays the establishment of the County Poor Farm at this location in 1887, its transition into a facility for long-term indigent medical care between the two world wars, and its emergence as a medical and rehabilitation center in the early post World War II years. The building was erected in 1926 to serve as the second administration building for the County Poor Farm. It housed the administrative offices, superintendent's office, post office, and additional patient ward space. The Administration Building was prominently sited at the main entrance to South Campus on Dahlia Street facing east towards the east-west axis of Consuelo Street. It was intended by this location and placement to be the first building seen by visitors to the campus, and was therefore representative of the importance and mission of Rancho Los Amigos. The open, park-like setting surrounding the building created a separation between the building and the interior buildings located further west on Consuelo Street toward the center of South Campus. Today, the building is still sited within this open space, and it retains the same spatial relationships to the hospital buildings on the south campus. It still functions as an office building, and presently houses the Los Angeles County Office of Public Safety.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1926<sup>1</sup>
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Administration / Safety Police Building.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with the Administration / Safety Police Building.
6. **Original plans and construction:** An incomplete set of original architectural drawings prepared by the County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department are located on file with the County of Los Angeles.
7. **Alterations and additions:** The Administration / Safety Police Building was updated for its current occupants. Alterations include: replacement stucco, which duplicates the original texture; replacement windows, which are set within original openings and duplicate original division of lights; replacement of all wood doors, except the main entrance door, with metal doors; and removal of an arcade that extended west from an existing arcade on the north elevation after the 1933 Long Beach earthquake. Although altered, the building reflects its period of construction.

### B. Historic Context:

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads, supplied with water from an artesian well, and improved with a Refectory Building (Dining Hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry

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<sup>1</sup> According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas, cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of \$1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horse power engine and stored in a water tower.<sup>2</sup>

The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a County medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, would create the impetus for expanded development at the County Poor Farm in ensuing decades. The influx of new patients at the County Poor Farm provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

In June 1915, William Ruddy Harriman was appointed the new superintendent at the County Poor Farm in order to reestablish the facility after devastating floods and a hog cholera epidemic in 1914 damaged the property's agricultural enterprises. Harriman promptly moved his family into the new Craftsman residence that had been constructed by the prior County Poor Farm superintendent, Charles C. Manning, at the center of the property. When Harriman took over management responsibilities at the County Poor Farm, the institution was providing care to 500 indigent men and women with a staff of 45. Under Harriman's leadership (1915-1931; 1933-1952), the County Poor Farm's agricultural fields and livestock rebounded and an ambitious plan of improvements, including new and expanded wards, was immediately begun to address the rapidly expanding need for patient accommodations and services. Harriman dramatically improved the property, installing an irrigation system, upgrading the utilities, constructing new buildings, organizing administration duties and developing the property's park-like landscape. These improvements were largely accomplished in the wake of the financial surge following World War I.<sup>3</sup>

The range of improvements Harriman initiated at the County Poor Farm reflects the rapid growth of the facility during the 1920s. New and expanded services included the construction of new on-site housing that was provided for the employees responsible for around-the-clock patient care and attention, patient wards, additions to men and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room

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<sup>2</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

<sup>3</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

In addition to the physical changes that were implemented under Harriman's leadership, there were also philosophical changes at the County Poor Farm. Harriman subscribed to the idea that the physical condition of an individual could be improved through occupational therapy activities and uplifting surroundings. Harriman's philosophy for self-improvement soon encompassed every activity at the County Poor Farm. He insisted that the patient's needs and comfort be addressed through the development of amenities at the County Poor Farm. Patients were assigned to work on the farm or in the greenhouse, based on their physical capabilities and individual talents. These occupational therapy activities were also intended as physical therapy, by providing the patients with fresh air, sunshine and independence.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, as residency continued to increase, Harriman expanded and improved the County Poor Farm's facilities, including a number of large building projects. Understanding the need to house additional patients, Harriman began the construction of four patient wards in 1922 followed by an additional four wards soon after. This project signaled the full-fledged transition of the farm from a rehabilitative care facility for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients. By 1922, the institution had a staff of approximately 175 employees to care for the needs of the 1,500 ambulatory patients living at the South Campus.<sup>5</sup> By late 1925, an additional five infirmary wards had been constructed. Several substantial buildings continued to be erected through the 1920s. In 1928, the old brick refectory building was razed and replaced with an 850-seat Spanish Colonial Revival Auditorium which provided much needed diversions to the ailing patients and staff. Movies were screened weekly in the Auditorium and other musical types of entertainment were offered as well.

Prior to the construction of the Administration / Safety Police Building in 1926, office and administrative functions at the Poor Farm were housed within the Administration Building, built in 1889 (no longer extant). Given the dilapidated condition of the old Administration Building, including a condemned upper floor, plans were begun for a new Administration Building in the then popular Spanish Colonial Revival Style in 1926. The Administration Building was completed in 1929. Harriman and other managers at the facility had offices in the new building. The stately building, which also provided a central lobby and reception services for visitors to the facility, symbolized the expansion and evolution of the Poor Farm during the 1920s.

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<sup>4</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, Henry. 5 October 1959. "History of the Rancho." Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives. Box 25, Folder 57.

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By the end of the 1920s, the County Poor Farm comprised an impressive 540 acres of farmland and buildings, with a property value of \$2 million dollars. Real estate improvements included 3 annual crop yields, one mile of paved roads, an additional one and one-fourth miles of decomposing granite roads, miles of sewer mains connected to the County sanitation system, hundreds of acres of new lawns, gardens, trees, and numerous buildings serving a variety of purposes.<sup>6,7</sup>

## PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The Spanish Colonial Revival style Administration / Safety Police Building forms a squared U-shape in plan and is two stories in height. The building has retained most of its character-defining features: horizontal-massing and U-shaped plan; projecting and receding wall planes on the façade; smooth stucco walls; cross-gabled roof with tower and domed cupola and red-clay tile covering; decorative façade entrance bay consisting of Baroque style cast stone portal and recessed entry; use of arched openings, including windows and arcade; and incorporation of patio spaces. Its setting as the primary entrance building for Rancho Los Amigos was altered when the main entrance was relocated northwest to the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Imperial Highway and the functions of South Campus were terminated or relocated to North Campus.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Administration / Safety Police Building is excellent. Although the building has been altered, its exterior appearance still reflects its period of construction.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Administration / Safety Police Building's net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces) calculates to 13,565 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage of 14,975 square feet and a footprint of 7,634 square feet.<sup>8</sup>
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete foundation.

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<sup>6</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

<sup>7</sup> Harriman, William R. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

<sup>8</sup> Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217–056, No. 21, Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Pasadena, CA.

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3. **Walls:** The exterior walls consist of reinforced concrete covered with stucco. The main entrance has been adorned with cast stone pilasters, fluted columns, orb-topped pedestals, and quoins.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The Administration / Safety Police Building is a two-story reinforced concrete structure. The building is about 40 feet tall, with intermediate floors between the second floor and roof intended for storage. Concrete bearing walls support the perimeter of the building and provide shear strength for the structure. The interior of the concrete floor and roof is supported by concrete beams and columns.
5. **Arcade, Balconies, Terraces:** A single-story, four-bay arcade projects off the north elevation of the building and spans three quarters of the first floor. It is elevated a few steps above ground level and enclosed by wrought-iron railings. A secondary entrance consisting of a multi-light, wood-framed door topped by a multi-light transom, opens off the arcade. On the west (rear) elevation, the central section of the second story is recessed, creating a second-story terrace on the roof of the first level. The terrace is enclosed by a solid wall with a crenellated parapet. The south elevation contains a two-bay arcaded balcony set flush with the exterior wall. This balcony is located at the landing level between stories and is enclosed by wrought iron railing.
6. **Bays and Projections:** There are slightly projecting and receding wall planes on the building's east-facing façade and west and south elevations. The east façade is characterized by five bays. The three central bays are recessed and contain large arched windows on the first floor and flat-headed, tripartite windows on the second floor. The projecting north bay is similarly fenestrated and capped by an intersecting front gable. The projecting south bay features a Baroque style cast stone portal. Projecting, front-gabled wings at each end organize the west (rear) elevation into three sections. A one-story, front gabled wing is attached to the north projection of the rear elevation. The north and south elevations are organized into two wall planes, a slightly projecting, front-gabled section on the east and a side-gabled section on the west.
7. **Chimneys:** The Administration Building has one chimney located on the eastern slope of the roof near the south elevation and is clad in stucco.
8. **Openings:**
  - a. **Windows:** Openings on the east-facing façade of the Administration / Safety Police Building are arranged in an asymmetrical, linear pattern. All original fenestration has been replaced. Primary windows on the east façade lower story include four equal-sized, tripartite, round-headed windows on the first floor. Each window is recessed, multi-light, and topped by a semi-circular transom

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divided by radiating muntins. Four flat-headed windows of similar configuration are lined up on the second story. Fenestration on the north, west, and south elevations is functionally and asymmetrically arranged and includes double-casement windows (some with transoms) and small, rectangular, multi-light fixed windows. All window openings are defined by raised concrete sills. Small circular windows are located in the gable ends. Two galvanized iron skylights with safety glass are located below the ridgeline of the west elevation.

- b. Doors:** The main entrance occupies the projecting south bay of the east elevation. The Baroque style frontispiece is defined by a rusticated cast stone surround that extends into the second story where it terminates in an espadaña. Two fluted columns on pedestals flank the entry. Within the flat-headed recess, an original double door, glazed with a wood frame, is flanked by two-light sidelights and topped by a transom window. Above the opening, the two columns support a small ornamental balcony. Orb-topped pedestals are set above the columns on axis. A flat-headed tripartite window is centered over the balcony, set within a curvilinear surround and punctuated by pilasters. Above the window, the espadaña is rimmed by a raised cornice accented with urns, and contains a flat panel inscribed with the year 1926.

**9. Roof:**

The building has a medium-pitch, side-gabled red clay tile roof with no overhanging eaves. On the south end of the east-facing façade, an eight-sided tower capped by a red-clay tile roof rises above the primary roof and is surmounted by a domed cupola. A galvanized iron gutter sheathed in plaster runs directly underneath the eaves of the roof and wraps around the entire building.

- C. Description of Interior:** The primary entrance is located on the south corner of the building and provides access to a waiting room and reception area. The reception area has a fireplace with wooden mantle topped by an arched alcove. U-shaped corridors, with the spine running north-south, provide circulation on both levels. A three-arched arcade with scored columns is located on the northern end of the first floor corridor. The original floor plans indicate that a number of small offices that open off of the double-loaded north-south corridor on the first floor have been subdivided from the larger original spaces. The former superintendent's office is located in the northeast corner of the building, accessible both from the main corridor and from the secondary entrance and foyer located off the north arcade. The upper story division of spaces is still reflective of the bedrooms originally intended for this level. The upstairs sitting room has a fireplace on the southern wall. It has a wooden mantel with the hearth framed by two rows of squared tile. Two pilasters in the room are accented by floral corbels as are most columns in the first and second floor hallways. A large patio with terra cotta flooring occupies much of the western portion of the second floor. Two staircases, one each at the south and north ends of the building, provided vertical circulation.

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**D. Site:**

1. **General setting:** The existing landscaping surrounding the Administration / Safety Police Building consists of a park-like open space of lawns punctuated by mature trees and shrubs. Garden beds are located immediately adjacent to the building around most of its perimeter. A concrete driveway surrounds the building, leading to a concrete parking lot on the west.
2. **Orientation:** The Administration / Safety Police Building is located along the west side of the Consuelo Street traffic circle, southwest of the intersection of Consuelo Street and Dahlia Avenue. The building is the visual terminus for traffic entering the Rancho Los Amigos south campus from the east on Consuelo Street. Accordingly, the majority of architectural detail is concentrated on the east facade.

**PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

**A. Architectural Drawings:**

An incomplete set of original architectural drawings prepared by the County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department are located on file with the County of Los Angeles. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Diamond West Engineering, Inc. for the County of Los Angeles.

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**C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:**

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**D. Supplemental Material:**

Reduced copies of an incomplete set of original architectural drawings  
Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

HABS documentation for the Administration / Safety Police Building was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus

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Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Ms. Wanda Ostermann of Diamond West Engineering, Inc., Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.